

Psalm 139, 1-15

1. *O Lord, you have searched me out and known me;
you know my sitting down and my rising up; you discern my thoughts
from afar.*
2. *You mark out my journeys and my resting place and are acquainted
with all my ways.*
3. *For there is not a word on my tongue, but you, O Lord, know it
altogether.*
4. *You encompass me behind and before and lay your hand upon me.*
5. *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, so high that I cannot attain it.*
6. *Where can I go then from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your
presence?*
7. *If I climb up to heaven, you are there; if I make the grave my bed, you
are there also.*
8. *If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of
the sea,*
9. *Even there your hand shall lead me, your right hand hold me fast.*
10. *If I say, 'Surely the darkness will cover me
and the light around me turn to night,'*
11. *Even darkness is no darkness with you;
the night is as clear as the day;
darkness and light to you are both alike.*
12. *For you yourself created my inmost parts; you knit me together in
my mother's womb.*
13. *I thank you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
marvellous are your works, my soul knows well.*
14. *My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was made in secret and woven in the depths of the earth.*
15. *Your eyes beheld my form, as yet unfinished;
already in your book were all my members written.*

You, O Lord, created my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

Psalm 139 expresses the omniscience, omnipresence and creative power of God. in a personal way.

God knows the psalmist's every movement, his thoughts before he thinks them, and understands every word which he speaks. God is always near, and God's knowledge is beyond the psalmist's understanding.

Even if he could, the psalmist cannot escape God's presence. The wings of the morning (v.8) may refer to the dawn as a winged creature.

The sea, lying to the west of Palestine, is used to indicate that the whole universe is filled with the presence of God. Even the darkness has no reality for God, who is light.

The Rector at St. Andrews once said about vocation to ordination, "It nags and nags at you until it turns into realisation." We may feel that, whatever we do, we cannot escape the call of God. This is illustrated in the call of Samuel to be a prophet in the first book of Samuel, in which he is seen as being called four times.

Then the psalmist passes on to think of his own person; he holds no mystery for God, who formed his inward parts (kidneys, which were thought to be organs of thought), and knit his frame together. 'Woven in the depths of the earth' refers to an ancient belief that children were formed in mother earth before they entered the womb.

V.15 develops the idea of the "book of the living" Before the psalmist was born, God recorded the number of days given to him. It is a statement of the complete knowledge of God. This can be seen in Psalm 69, where the psalmist asks that those, who attack and insult him, be removed from God's roll of the living: 'Let them be wiped out of the book of the living and not be written among the righteous.'

We spend much of our lives acquiring knowledge, in education and in life in general. The more we learn, the more we realise we don't know. We have made much progress in medicine, science and technology, but much research is still needed, and there are many things which we do not know. We may know many things about our friends and relatives, but also much which remains hidden.

God's complete knowledge of us is a mystery, which is somewhat scary, but also it frees us to begin to understand that he loves us as we are, created by him. That is a cause for great joy and an encouragement to serve God as best we can, all expressed in the beautiful hymn, When Christ was lifted from the earth, which says in verse 2:

'Still east and west his love extends,
and always, near or far,
he calls and claims us as his friends
and loves us as we are.'

Prayer

Merciful Lord,
you have prepared for those who love you
such good things as pass our understanding:
pour into our hearts such love towards you
that we, loving you in all things and above all things,
may obtain your promises,

which exceed all that we can desire;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

(Collect for Trinity 6)